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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 000984

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/16/2033
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: XI JINPING ELECTED PRC VICE PRESIDENT

REF: A. BEIJING 898
[1](#)B. BEIJING 873
[1](#)C. BEIJING 809

Classified By: Political Section Internal Unit Chief Dan Kritenbrink.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (C) Hu Jintao was "re-elected" President of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission by a plenary session of the National People's Congress (NPC) on March 15. The NPC deputies elected Xi Jinping PRC Vice President and re-elected Wu Bangguo as the NPC Chairmman. Thirteen new NPC Vice Chairmen were elected along with a 161-member NPC Standing Committee that included recently retired former Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing. The NPC also passed the draft proposal on reorganizing State Council ministries that was presented to deputies for discussion in an earlier session. The election proceeding was highly ritualized, but the general atmosphere was more relaxed than usual, with PBSC members showing unusual emotion at the results and NPC staff in the gallery engaging PolOfs in conversation. Comment: The election of Xi, who was elevated to the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) at the 17th Communist Party Congress last October, would seem to be another indication that he is in line to replace Hu Jintao as Party chief at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. End Summary and Comment.

Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, Wu Bangguo Get Top Positions

[1](#)2. (C) In an elaborately staged election ritual, which included the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) members descending in rank order from the dais to place their four color-coded large (14" X 20") ballots in a huge red ballot box at the beginning of the vote, Party chief Hu Jintao was "re-elected" PRC President and Chairman of the state's Central Military Commission (CMC). In a vote that would appear to be a further indication that recently appointed PBSC Member Xi Jinping is in line to succeed Hu as top Party leader in five years, Xi was elected Vice President. (Comment: Xi was one of two younger-generation leaders elevated to the PBSC at the 17th Party Congress in October and was ranked ahead of his peer, Li Keqiang.)

[1](#)3. (C) The results of the voting, including votes for, against and abstentions for each person, and the names of write-in candidates, were read to the deputies and displayed on large screens on both sides of the stage. Hu received the least number of dissenting votes and Wu the second lowest number among all candidates. While the number of votes cast against Xi was not high in comparison to other candidates, it was triple the number of votes cast against Wu. Deputies erupted in laughter when former Party chief Jiang Zemin received one write-in vote for President and former Premier Zhu Rongji received one vote for CMC Chair, but were sober when write-in votes for Vice President were announced. These included five write-in ballots cast for PBSC member Li

Keqiang, Xi's competitor in the 2012 Party chief sweepstakes, one for current Politburo Member Wang Zhaoguo and one for outgoing Vice President Zeng Qinghong, who Xi will replace and who stepped down from the PBSC at the 17th Party Congress.

Voting Process

14. (C) In addition to electing top state leaders, the deputies elected a slate of leaders for the new NPC, including re-electing PBSC member Wu Bangguo to another five-year term as NPC Chairman, Li Jianguo as the new NPC Secretary-General, thirteen Vice Chairmen and an NPC Standing Committee of 161 members, 14 less than the previous Standing Committee. State Councilor Chen Zhili and Hua Jianmin, former Secretary-General, were among the newly-elected Vice Chairmen and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Li Zhaoxing, who stepped down last summer, was listed among those elected to the NPC Standing Committee. The deputies had been given a list of the candidates ahead of time, but these were not made available to the media or diplomatic corps attending the session. The number of candidates for the NPC Standing Committee exceeded the number of positions by 12 (173 candidates for 161 positions). In order for their ballots to be accepted, deputies were instructed to strike 12 names from the ballot, or more if they wrote in candidates, and to return 161 completed ballots with either an "approve" (zancheng), "oppose" (fandui) or "abstain" (qiquan) by each name. The names and results of all 161 new Standing Committee members were read. Finally, the controversial proposal to create several "super-ministries" in the State Council was put to the vote and received a surprising number of negative responses (117 negative votes and 99 abstentions).

15. (C) As Hu, Xi, and Wu in turn stood and bowed to the audience, they received an enthusiastic ovation. The voting results for the three leaders and the super-ministry proposal are as follows:

Name/Item For Against Abstain Percent

Hu Jintao	2956	3	5	99.7
(President)				
Xi Jinping	2919	28	17	98.5
(Vice President)				
Hu Jintao	2959	4	4	99.7
(CMC Chair)				
Wu Bangguo	2948	9	9	99.4
(NPC Chair)				

Super Ministry Plan	2744	117	99	92.7
(failed to vote 4)				

Some of the NPC Standing Committee candidates were sent a strong message of disapproval, with one member receiving an astounding 830 negative votes and 289 abstentions, 38 percent of the 2948 ballots cast. If past practice holds, none of these vote totals will be made public.

Grand Ritual in the Great Hall of the People

16. (C) Preceding the ritual parade of PBSC members from their seats to the ballot box, the grand election drama included the ceremonial anointment of special-uniformed election monitors in front on the dais, the inspection and placement of large colorful ballot boxes throughout the assembled deputies by the monitors; the distribution of ballots to the deputies by the monitors; the reading by an NPC spokesman of complex rules governing the voting process; the marking of the ballots; and finally, the insertion of the four brightly-colored ballots in designated boxes by each deputy with great fanfare under the monitors' watchful eyes. As deputies were filling out their ballots, they were asked to refrain from taking pictures, members of the media were escorted out of the hall and diplomats were asked to turn off

their cameras. The media were allowed back in once the deputies began depositing ballots in the boxes. Deputies marked their ballots in front of their colleagues and made no attempt to cover them before walking to the ballot boxes. One of the NPC staff members sitting near PolOffs commented that "this is different from your elections. We don't hide our votes from others."

17. (C) The general atmosphere of the session was much more relaxed, if not more informal, than other NPC plenary sessions that PolOffs have attended in the past two years. Politburo members seated on the dais chatted with one another during the proceedings and displayed an unusual degree of collegial emotion once the results were announced. Zeng Qinghong, seated next to his successor Xi Jinping, stood up and gave Xi an enthusiastic bear hug and then shook Xi's hand for the cameras. Zeng then walked to Hu Jintao and Wu Bangguo and embraced them in similar fashion to the delight of the deputies. NPC staff seated near the diplomatic corps on the second tier of the Great Hall auditorium interacted amiably with PolOffs, explaining the proceedings and responding to questions about their backgrounds and duties. It quickly became clear that many of them did not know all the players and did not fully understand the process themselves, often giving inconsistent or contradictory answers to PolOffs questions. One particularly well-informed staff member, when asked why outgoing Vice President Zeng Qinghong was present, but not outgoing Vice Premiers Wu Yi or Zeng Peiyan, replied "it is all in the Constitution. Read the Constitution." Meanwhile, Chinese observers were asking about, or commenting to one another on, the identities and capabilities of this or that Politburo member.

Comment

18. C) Xi Jinping's "election" to the Vice Presidency further solidifies his status as heir-apparent to Hu Jintao. Tomorrow, March 16, Premier Wen Jiabao is expected to be "re-elected" and the CMC members "elected," and on March 17, the slate of new Vice Premiers, State Councilors and Ministers is expected to be voted on. The entire NPC session will close on Tuesday, March 18.

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